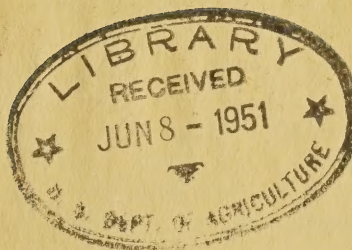


LIVESTOCK EXTENSION WORK
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

by

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Livestock Extension Work Past, Present, and Future

The chap who promoted the idea that life begins at 40 may have been right, but at 65 it becomes complicated by lumbago, arthritis, bifocals, sibilant dentures, and an almost irresistible inclination to look back more than forward and to tell one's favorite old stories over and over. I can assure you that any which I attempt today by way of illustration will be aged in the wood.

I find it much easier to dig up something to say about the first section of this assignment than to attempt to appraise the present or look into the future. My personal contact with livestock extension does not quite cover the first half of the twentieth century. It was in 1905, I believe that as a lathy youngster I helped show my father's little cob-rolling Poland China boar and a broad-hooked 2,700-pound Shorthorn bull to championships at our county fair under the confident and rapid-fire judgment of W. J. Kennedy - my first contact with a representative of Iowa State College. A little later at the county farmers' institute I learned from P. G. Holden how to test corn by the rag-doll method and listened to R. K. Bliss attempt to ease into our reluctant minds the need for the then new and mysterious things called proteins in our livestock rations. Fairs, farmers' institutes, and a then new institution, the traveling winter short course, constituted about the only means of access to the college available to farmers at that time. But they were enough to make me want to know more about the institution and to take advantage of its opportunities.

So, since 1912, I have been engaged continuously in one sort or another of livestock extension work, first for 4 years as fieldman for the Iowa Beef Producers Association extension program, and since 1916 as extension animal husbandman at Iowa State College. Perhaps then, for the sole reason of length of contact with it, I am qualified to discuss some angles of livestock extension work.

It has been said that knowing what needs to be done is wisdom; knowing how to do it is skill; getting it done is work; and the successful combination of the three constitutes service. The man or men who designated our agricultural extension organizations in the States and Nation as Extension Services were wiser, perhaps, than they knew. Service to the livestock producers of his State, and through them to the whole population, always has been and I trust always will be the prime purpose and objective of the extension animal husbandman. I am sure it will be the main objective of the useful and successful ones. Good extension men of the past and present all have had something of the missionary spirit, although most of them would be the last to admit it publicly. As a matter of fact this is what has kept most of us at our jobs through the years. Certainly in the past it has not been the high financial rewards or other forms of recognition from the institutions we represent.

There may be exceptions, but from a cold and hard-boiled personal standpoint there is little reason why anyone should have started into or stuck with livestock extension work in most Midwestern States during the past 40 years. The long and irregular hours, the absence from home, travel conditions, the low salaries even compared with resident teaching and experiment station levels, and the lack of opportunity for scholastic improvement and advance-

ment all were drawbacks and to some extent still are.

The average extension wife has deserved the world's sympathy and admiration. She has had to head the household, bring up the children, fire the furnace, pay the bills, attend church and parent-teachers' meetings for the family, and put up with a tired and discouraged extension man over week ends, all in addition to being enough of a financial wizard to stretch an inadequate and inelastic income over a growing cost of living budget. My hat is off to her.

One of the happy changes that have come about in recent years is that many of these situations have been to some extent ameliorated. The unfortunate tendency toward division of college, experiment station, and extension into separate and more or less isolated groups which occurred in some institutions apparently has run its course and we are getting back together again to the benefit of all, and most of all, to the advantage of extension. It is having a fine effect in remedying many of the difficulties and inequities of the past as well as in bringing about better understanding and relationships.

But the extension animal husbandman's job always has been, is now, and probably always will be quite different in many respects from those of the men in the resident staff. The men in his audience are under no outside compulsion to come to "class", have no reason to stay if not interested, and there is no pull to bring them back except the hope and expectation of getting information and help they need.

In my experience the livestock farmer is first of all that much publicized character the rugged individualist. He does not relish being told what he has to do. On the other hand his heavy capital investment, unavoidable risks, the constant pressure of decisions and choices he has to make, the pressing need for efficiency and economy of operation, and the uncertainties of supply, demand, and price situations all keep him on the alert. He is not looking for ready-made answers but for facts and information on which to base his judgments and procedures. That primarily is what has made working with him a constant challenge and to me a lot of fun.

I am old-fashioned in many ways. And particularly I hold with some fervor to the old-fashioned belief in individual choice, initiative, and responsibility. Apparently agriculture and particularly the men in the livestock production business provide one of the last strongholds for that conception of the American way. Time goes fast at my age, and there are many things I would like to see accomplished in the livestock field. But I am in no such hurry that I want to see a job in animal husbandry extension anything but the opportunity through information, leadership, demonstration, persuasion (the processes of education), to obtain the adoption of improved livestock production programs and procedures to the end that the enterprise may be more pleasant, productive, and profitable to the farmer and of greater service to our country.

Perhaps the most significant change in the extension picture -- the whole agricultural education picture -- that has occurred within my experience is the remarkable shift in the mine-run farmer's attitude toward the college, experiment station, and extension services. This through the years has run

the gamut from hostility, indifference, skepticism, and mild interest to the present situation where the simple announcement of a swine or cattle feeders' day where some new finding is to be unveiled brings hundreds and sometimes thousands flocking to the colleges or experimental farms or field days. The out-in-front livestock men, and even more the feed manufacturers and dealers, are so hot on the trail of what's new that they and the farm press scarcely give the harried experimentalist a chance to wait for proof of the statistical significance of his latest findings before they ferret them out and the extension man is hard put to keep ahead of his constituents.

It's a far cry from the time when I taught red-knuckled 10-thumbed farm boys to throw a half hitch, tie a bowline knot, make a rope halter, and splice a rope, in order to gain an audience to listen to my story of better practices in livestock feeding and management, to the comprehensive youth and adult livestock extension programs of today. During my time I have seen the change in extension emphasis from simple practice to project, from project to program, and from program to almost universal adoption and broad application of many of the fundamental discoveries of the experiment stations. This changed attitude and growth in receptiveness on the part of farmers and livestock men indicates that our programs have been on the right track at least part of the time, and even more importantly the farmers' own feeling of need for what we have had to offer.

Livestock extension work with farm boys and girls, in the start of which I am proud to have had a part, has long since paid off and continue to do so. The second generation of baby beef champion exhibitors has arrived in many States and the third is on the way! But more important is the stream of 4-H members and Future Farmers who have trooped through our junior activities, to our colleges, and back to the farm communities, where their attitudes and leadership are the backbone of our extension programs and organizations for education in hundreds of communities today.

The young extension worker of today scarcely realizes how big a part local and county organization for agricultural education plays in multiplying the results of his efforts. When I started in extension work two Iowa counties had crop-improvement associations with "farm advisers" at their helms. Scattered over the State were local farmers' institute and short course committees and, of course, the county fair boards. These were the only organized local points of contact for the extension worker. Contrast this situation with the complete and far-flung State, county, and local extension organization of today through which we work in all our States with scarcely a thought of how that came about.

In most of our States the extension animal husbandman is still referred to with the euphemistic title of "specialist." I have given up the hopeless task of quarreling with that designation. But I have observed that the more successful livestock specialists have learned that the profitable operation of a livestock farm includes sound planning and organization in the use of the farm and the farmer's resources and due consideration of his market outlets as well as the use of good breeding, feeding, and management in his livestock operations. The farmer cannot and does not try to separate these into compartments. And more and more the successful extension animal husbandman plans his program on that basis and cooperates as closely as possible with his farm management and marketing colleagues to the benefit of all concerned.

This is a gadget age. I am intrigued by many of our modern marvels and try to use them in our extension programs wherever I am smart enough to do so. Our efficient and well-organized information services do wonders in multiplying our efforts through their news releases, clip sheets, posters, visual aids, movies, radio, and now television. When we have followed our political friends a little further into the comic-book field it would seem that we will have gone about as far as we can go. But, of course, that is not true. There will be more and better gadgets in our future. But I cannot bring myself to believe that we can now or in the foreseeable future have completely effective push-button extension education any more than we can hope to win push-button wars.

In nearly 40 years of trying I have been unable to discover any really effective way to do extension work except with people. The old method of measuring the effectiveness of an extension man's work by the number of days he spent in the field was not too far wrong in some respects although I'd sooner they did not supply that measuring stick to me now. The extension man gets to know his people -- their problems, limitations, and capabilities; their resources and backgrounds -- by meeting them on their farms, in their counties and areas, and in their organizations. And in such contacts they get to know and have confidence in him and in his programs and teachings. Every good piece of extension work in the past has started with friendly contact by the specialist with people where they were and worked forward from there. I would guess that will be true for some time to come. But starting points seem nearer the goals now than they used to be, the obstacles seem not so great, and progress will be faster than in the early years of extension.

There is no need to point out to this assembly the fundamental soundness of the position of the livestock business in the American scene. So long as we have the growing population, the expanding economy, the industrial production, and the tremendous and widely distributed purchasing power of recent years and of the present, the relative position of the livestock producer is secure. Nowhere but in the United States is there such opportunity for him. A nation which can absorb on a per capita basis for five consecutive years roughly 145 pounds of red meat, 30 pounds of poultry, 257 quarts of milk, 375 eggs, 11 pounds of butter, and 6 pounds of cheese at the current rate of exchange for industrial products is something of a livestock man's paradise, as compared with what it was during some periods which I remember too well.

But this very demand, insatiable as it appears to be, tends to conceal one of the weak spots in the industry's position. That is our near failure to consider sufficiently the needs and wishes of the consumer and the interdependence of the producer, processor, retailer, and consumer in this business of ours. Great strides have been made in recent years in processor-producer relations and understanding. But as producers we still are prone to give small consideration to the needs and desires of the housewife, who is our most important and final customer, and then to blame the packer for our troubles when we have miscalculated the kind and quality of our product that she will buy at prices satisfactory to us as producers.

We hear a good deal these days about consumer education, producer-consumer relations, and the need for presenting the livestock producer's side of the story in proper focus to the consumer. I'm not sure that the need for presenting the consumer's side to the producer may not be equally important. Particularly the livestock producer needs better understanding of the part such things as our population growth, trends and shifts, our expanding industrial economy, rising purchasing power and standards of living, and changing food habits have played and are now playing in the changing demand for his products. It can be set down without fear of contradiction that the most important essential in the continued prosperity and further expansion in the livestock production field is an expanding and prosperous over-all national economy. I believe that the extension animal husbandman has an opportunity and a duty to bring about a better understanding of this among livestock men as well as through consumer education.

In the early thirties, at the insistence of our then director of extension, our animal husbandry extension staff prepared a 20-year plan for animal husbandry extension in Iowa. At first this assignment was a mental and anatomical pain. But before we got through with it, it became a stimulating adventure. The 20 years are nearly up. Reading that plan today in the light of nearly 20 years of developments, changes, accomplishments, and failures is also an experience. The amazing thing to me now is not how often we were wrong in our analyses and planning, but rather how often we apparently were on the right track in our anticipation of coming needs and problems and in the plans we made to meet them. For example, we were right in our expectation of further decline in demand for lard and fat cuts of pork and for heavy overfinished beef. Our guesses as to increases in oilseed crops and increasing competition from vegetable oils were correct. We foresaw the need for spreading our hog production and marketing through more months of the year and for marketing at lighter weights. We were out in front on the need for pasture improvement, increased production of grass and roughage, and livestock production programs that would include increased and more efficient use of these products of better land use. We correctly anticipated our increasing problems in sanitation, disease and parasite control, and management for prevention of livestock loss. Cost cutting through increasing the litter size and the percentage of lamb and calf crop, and improvement in type and feeding efficiency, were not new ideas but were a part of our program.

We did not anticipate the impact of a World War and its aftermath nor our population growth, the expansion of our economy, and the upsurge in demands for our products. Who in the depression thirties could do that except a prophet? Beef bull testing, hybrid hogs, urea, stilbestrol, B₁₂, and antibiotics were not in our ken. Nor did we expect so quickly the practical extinction of the midwestern farm work horse, although we had our suspicions.

Our plans and programs designed to meet the situations we visualized were no more completely workable and successful than our vision had been. But in general they have proved of some merit.

Any half-smart extension man realizes that not all of the changes and improvements for which he has worked are due entirely to his efforts. But if he is worth his salt he has the guts to believe that he has had a real and valuable

part in bringing about such changes as the boost from the $4\frac{1}{2}$ -pig average litter of not so many years back to the $6\frac{1}{2}$ -pig or better average of today. Or the 200-240 pound hog ready for market at 6 months or less now, instead of at 8 or 9 months as of old. He points with some pride to the 85-percent, calf crop now instead of 75-percent; to the 30 cattle marketed annually per 100 of cattle population instead of less than 25; to the good grade 1,050-1,100 pound steer developed now from grass and roughage and 40 bushels of corn or less instead of the old 50 to 60 bushels -- and so on and on.

As I look back it seems sometimes that more of my time has been spent in helping to meet emergencies than in the supposedly main educational functions of my job. Two periods of drives for all-out livestock production to meet the demands of World Wars and reconstruction, and efforts to help meet the impacts of inflations, deflations, depressions, droughts, floods, freezes, and storms, stand out in my recollection. Unwilling participation in selling, explaining, and setting up governmental programs of production controls, price fixing, and rationing are more in the nature of nightmares than memories. But they are all part of the experience of many an old-time extension man.

Many of the emergencies taught their lessons and had beneficial side effects. For example, never did the demand for and use of protein supplements make such strides as during the practically cost-plus hog, dairy, and poultry production drives of the Second World War. And the producers who tried balanced rations for the first time under patriotic compulsion have stayed with them since. What a boon to feed manufacturers that period turned out to be.

Cooperation from the beginning has been a watchword in the extension fields. Like politics, at times it has brought in some strange bedfellows. It has ground a lot of axes. But cooperation with various branches of industry, with organizations, groups, and agencies, has in many cases increased the extension man's resources and multiplied the results of his efforts. Judicious cooperation is still a fine resource in our extension programs.

These rambling remarks must wind up somewhere and soon. So, paraphrasing a famous quotation, I think we may safely say that the past in animal husbandry extension has been fruitful; the present is generally sound and useful; and the future is encouraging and hopeful. I would guess that we will continue to have animal husbandry extension as long as the taxpayer can be convinced that it serves a useful purpose.